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Office of University Communications

August 11, 2014

Students, Instructors, & Practitioners Gathered for Research Presentations at Annual Event

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – The Gardner-Webb University School of Psychology and Counseling recently hosted an annual conference designed to offer professional experience to graduate students and earned-credit opportunities for mental health practitioners. The Gamma Alpha Omega Summer Counseling Symposium was held at Gardner-Webb's Tucker Student Center over the summer, and organizers say the event has grown tremendously since its inaugural session more than eight years ago.

Coordinating the conference was Dr. Linda Greene, a professor of counseling at Gardner-Webb. She said the symposium began as part of the course "The Counselor as Professional, Practitioner, and Consultant," which she teaches each summer.

"Professional development and leadership are key components of the course," Greene shared. "In 2006, I decided to require students to participate in a poster session at the end of the summer. This was set up to provide a presentation opportunity that was more like what students would encounter at a professional conference. The event expanded in 2010 when Dr. James Morgan and Dr. David Carscaddon agreed to have their students participate. And the following year, we expanded even further by including a keynote presentation and inviting area counseling professionals to attend. The Summer Counseling Symposium has now become an annual day-long event."

Dr. James Morgan, professor of psychology and counseling, and Courtney Watford, university counselor, offered the keynote presentation, "Positive Psychology-Enhanced Counseling." Morgan said they addressed how theory and research in the area of positive counseling can augment counseling effectiveness.

"We emphasized taking a strengths-based approach to counseling, and proposed many ideas about how positive psychology techniques including mindfulness, loving-kindness meditation training, and cultivation of gratitude can enhance counseling effectiveness," he offered. "We also highlighted how practicing positive psychology exercises each day can help counselors improve the quality of their own lives and contribute to maintaining effectiveness as a counselor."

Because subject matter experts presented the keynote address, Greene said Continuing Education Units (CEUs) were offered to area counseling practitioners in attendance. The afternoon sessions were coordinated and delivered by graduate students enrolled in the Mental Health Counseling or School Counseling programs at Gardner-Webb.

“The idea of presenting at a professional conference can be intimidating to many graduate students,” Greene stated. “This event allows our students to have that experience on a smaller scale in order to better prepare them for this aspect of professional life. In addition, it provides an opportunity for students to interact with others from different cohorts and learn from their presentations.”

Greene is excited about the symposium’s growth, and is looking toward future events. “Perhaps the most stimulating outgrowth of this year’s symposium is the launching of a professional journal that will offer students an opportunity to publish their research,” she said. “This conference has expanded a great deal over the years, and we plan to continue that trend.”

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University blends a liberal arts core curriculum with more than 55 major and minor professional programs of study, a comprehensive academic experience that flows from our Christian commitment to intellectual freedom, service and leadership.